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CY WHITTAKER'S PLACE

By JOSEPH C. LINCOLN

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But the captain's thoughts were far from Washington at that moment. His own face was aghast, and his eyes shone.

"Phoebe," he faltered unbelievably, "what was you going to say? Do you mean that—that?"

The side door of the house opened. The next instant Mr. Tidditt, a dripping umbrella in his hand, entered the sitting room.

"Hello, Whitt," he hailed. "Just run in for a minute to say howdy." Then he noticed the schoolmistress, and his expression changed. "Oh! How be you, Miss Dawes?" he said. "I didn't see you just off. Don't run away on my account."

"I was just going," said Phoebe, buttoning her jacket. Captain Cy accompanied her to the door.

"Goodby," she said. "There was something else I meant to say, but I think it is best to wait. I hope to have some good news for you soon, something that will send you to Washington with a light heart. Perhaps I shall hear tomorrow. If so I will call after school and tell you."

"Yes, do," urged the captain eagerly. "You'll find me here waiting. Good news or not, do come. I—I ain't said all I wanted to myself."

He returned to the sitting room. The town clerk was standing by the stove. He looked troubled.

"What's the row, Asaph?" asked Cy cheerily. He was overflowing with good nature.

"Oh, nothin' special," replied Mr. Tidditt. "You look joyful enough for two of us. Had good company, ain't you?"

"Why, yes; 'bout as good as there is what makes you look so glum?" Asaph hesitated.

"Phoebe was here yesterday, too, wasn't she?" he asked.

"Yup. What of it?"

"And the day afore that?"

"No, not for three days afore that. But what of it, I ask you?"

"Well, now, Cy, you mustn't get mad. I'm a friend of yours, and friends ought to be able to say most anything to each other. If—if I was you I wouldn't let Phoebe come so often—not here, you know, at your house. Course I know she comes with Bos'n and all, but—"

"Out with it!" The captain's tone was ominous. "What are you drivin' at?"

The caller fidgeted.

"Well, Whitt," he stammered, "there's considerable talkin' goin' on, that's all."

"Talkin'? What kind of talkin'?"

"Well, you know the kind. This town does a good deal of it, specially after church and prayer meetin'."

Seem' as if they thought 'twas a sort of proper place. I don't myself. I kind of like to keep my charity and brotherly love spread out through the week, but—"

"Are the folks in this town sayin' a word against Phoebe Dawes because she comes here to see—Bos'n?"

"Don't—don't get mad, Whitt. Don't look at me like that. I ain't said nothin'."

Why, a spell ago at the boardin' house I—"

He told of the meal at the perfect boarding house, where Miss Dawes championed his friend's cause; also of the conversation which followed and his own part in it. Captain Cy paced the floor.

"I wouldn't have her come so often, Cy," pleaded Asaph. "Honest I wouldn't. Course you and me know they're mean, miser'ble liars, but it's her I'm thinkin' of. She's a young woman and single, and you're a good many years older'n she is. And so, of course, you and she ain't ever goin' to get married. And have you thought what effect it might have on her keepin' her teacher's place? The committee's a majority against her as 'tis. And—you know I don't think so, but a good many folks do—you ain't got the best name just now. Darn it all, I ain't puttin' this the way I'd ought to, but you know what I mean, don't you, Cy?"

Captain Cy was leaning against the window frame, his head upon his arm. He was not looking out, because the shade was drawn. Tidditt waited anxiously for him to answer. At last he turned.

"Asaph," he said, "I'm much obliged to you. You've pounded it in pretty hard, but I can't say I'd ought to have had it done to me. I'm a fool—an old fool, just as I said awhile back—and actin' nor nobody ought to have made me forget it. For a minute or so I— But there; don't you fret. That young woman shan't risk her job nor her reputation on account of me—nor of Bos'n, either. I'll see to that. And, see here," he added fiercely, "I can't stop women's tongues, even when they're as bad as some of the tongues in this town, but if you hear a man say one word against Phoebe Dawes, only one word, you tell me his name. You hear, Asaph? You tell me his name. Now run along, will you? I ain't safe company just now."

Asaph, frightened at the effect of his words, hurriedly departed. Captain Cy paced the room for the next fifteen minutes; then he opened the kitchen door.

"Bos'n," he called. "Come in and set in my lap awhile. Don't you want to?"

"I'm—I'm sort of lonesome, little girl."

The next afternoon, when the schoolmistress, who had been delayed by the inevitable examination papers, stopped at the Cy Whittaker place she was met by Georgianna. Emily, who stood behind the housekeeper in the doorway, was crying.

"Cap'n Cy has gone away, to Washin'ton," declared Georgianna. "though what he's gone there for's more'n I know. He said he'd send his hotel address soon's he got there. He went on the 3 o'clock train."

Phoebe was astonished.

"Gone?" she repeated. "So soon? Why, he told me he should certainly be here to hear some news I expected today. Didn't he leave any message for me?"

The housekeeper turned red.

"Miss Phoebe," she said, "he told me to tell you somethin', and it's so dreadful I don't hardly dare to say it. I think his troubles have driven him crazy. He said to tell you that you'd better not come to this house any more."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN the old days, the great days of sailing ships and merchant fleets, Bayport was a community of travelers. Every ambitious man went to sea and eventually, if he lived, became a captain. Then he took his wife and, in most cases, his children with him on long voyages. To the stay at homes came letters with odd foreign stamps and postmarks. Our whatnots and parlor mantels were filled with carved bits of ivory, gorgeous shells, alabaster candelsticks and plaster miniatures of the leaning tower at Pisa or the Coliseum at Rome. We usually began a conversation with, "When my husband and I were at Hongkong the last time"—or, "I remember at Mauritius they always"—New Orleans and Frisco were the nearest domestic ports the mention of which was considered worth while.

But this is no longer. A trip to Boston is, of course, no novelty to the most of us, but when we visit New York we take care to advertise it beforehand. And the few who avail themselves of the spring "cut rates" and go on excursions to Washington plan definite programmes for each day at the capital and discuss them with envious friends for weeks in advance. And if the prearranged program is not scrupulously carried out we feel that we have been defrauded. It was the regret of Aunt Sophronia Hallett's life that on her Washington excursion she had not seen the "diplomatic corpse."

She saw the president and the monument and congress and "the relics in the Smithsonian institution," but the "corpse" was not on view. Aunt Sophronia never quite got over the disappointment.

Probably no other Bayporter in recent years has started for Washington on such short notice or with so ill defined a program as Captain Cy. He went because he felt that he must go somewhere. After the conversation with Asaph he simply could not remain at home. If Phoebe Dawes called he knew that he must see her, and if he saw her what should he say to her? He could not tell her that she must not visit the Cy Whittaker place again. If he did she would insist upon the reason. If he told her of the "town talk" he felt sure, knowing her, that she would indignantly refuse to heed the malicious gossip. And he was firmly resolved not to permit her to compromise her life and her future by friendship with a social outcast like himself. As for anything deeper and more sacred than friendship, that was ridiculous. If for a moment a remark of hers had led him to dream of such a thing it was because he was, as he had so often declared, an "old fool."

So Captain Cy had resolved upon flight, and he fled to Washington because the business of the "committee of one" offered a legitimate excuse for going there. The blunt message he had intrusted to Georgianna would, he believed, arouse Phoebe's indignation. She would not call again. And when he returned to Bos'n it would be to take up the child's fight alone. If he lost that fight, or when he lost it, he would close the Cy Whittaker place and leave Bayport for good.

He had been in Washington once before, years ago, when he was first mate of a ship and had a few weeks' shore leave. Then he went there on a pleasure trip with some seagoing friends and had a jolly time. But there was precious little jollity in the present visit. He had never felt so thoroughly miserable. In order to forget he made up his mind to work his hardest to discover why the harbor appropriation was not to be given to Bayport.

The city had changed greatly. He would scarcely have known it. He went to the hotel where he had stayed before and found a big modern building in its place. The clerk was inclined to be rather curt and perfunctory at first, but when he learned that the captain was not anxious concerning the price of accommodations, but merely wanted a "comfortable berth somewhere on the saloon deck" and appeared to have plenty of money he grew polite. Captain Cy was shown to his room, where he left his valise. Then he went down to dinner.

After the meal was over he seated himself in one of the big leather chairs in the hotel lobby, smoked and thought. In the summer, before Bos'n came and before her father had arisen to upset every calculation and wreck all his plans, the captain had given serious thought to what he should do

if Congressman Atkins failed, as even then he seemed likely to do, in securing that appropriation. The obvious thing, of course, would have been to hunt up Mr. Atkins and question him. But this was altogether too obvious. In the first place the strained relations between them would make the interview uncomfortable, and in the second if there was anything underhand in Heman's backsliding on the appropriation Atkins was too wary a bird to be snared with questions.

But Captain Cy had another acquaintance in the city, the son of a still older acquaintance, who had been a wealthy shipping merchant and mine owner in California. The son was also a congressman from a coast state, and the captain had read of him in the papers. A sketch of his life had been printed, and this made his identity absolutely certain. Captain Cy's original idea had been to write to this congressman. Now he determined to find and interview him.

He inquired concerning him of the hotel clerk, who, like all Washington clerks, was a walking edition of "Who's Who at the Capital."

"Congressman Everdean?" repeated the all knowing gentleman. "Yes, he's in town. Has rooms at the Gloria, second hotel on the right as you go up the avenue—only a short walk. What can I do for you, sir?"

The Gloria was an even bigger hotel than the one where the captain had his "berth." An inquiry at the desk of another important clerk was answered with a brisk:

"Mr. Everdean? Yes, he rooms here. Don't know whether he's in or not."

Evening, judge. Nice winter weather we're having."

The judge, who was a ponderous person, vaguely suggesting the great Heman, admitted that the weather was fine, patronizing it as he did so. The clerk continued the conversation. Captain Cy waited. At length he spoke.

"Excuse me, commodore," he said. "I don't like to break in until you've settled whether you have it snow or not, but I'm here to see Congressman Everdean. Hadn't you better order one of your footmen to hunt him up?"

The judge condescended to smile, as did several other men who stood near. The clerk reddened.

"Do you want to see Mr. Everdean?" he snapped.

"Why, yes, I did. But I can't see him from here without strainin' my eyesight."

The clerk sharply demanded one of the captain's visiting cards. He didn't get one, for the very good reason that there was none in existence.

"Tell him an old friend of his dad's is here on the main deck waitin' for him," said Captain Cy. "That'll do first rate. Thank you, admiral."

Word came that the congressman would be down in a few moments. The captain beguiled the interval by leaning on the rail and regarding the clerk with an awed curiosity that annoyed his object exceedingly. The inspection was still on when a tall man of an age somewhere in the early thirties walked briskly up to the desk.

"Who is it that wants to see me?" he asked.

The clerk waved a deprecatory hand in Captain Cy's direction. The newcomer turned.

"My name is Everdean," he said. "Are you—Hey! Great Scott! Is it possible this is Captain Whittaker?"

The captain was immensely pleased.

"Well, I declare, Ed!" he exclaimed. "I didn't believe you'd remember me after all these years. You was nothin' but a boy when I saw you out in Frisco. Well, well! No wonder you're in congress. A man that can remember faces like that ought to be president."

Everdean laughed as they shook hands.

"Don't suppose I'd forget the chap who used to dine with us and tell me those sea stories, do you?" he said. "I'm mighty glad to see you. What are you doing here? The last father and I heard of you were in South America. Given up the sea, they said, and getting rich fast."

Captain Cy chuckled.

"It's a good thing I learned long ago not to believe all I hear," he answered, "else I'd have been so sure I was rich that I'd have spent all I had and been a permanent boarder at the poorhouse by now. No, thanks; I've had dinner. Why, yes, I'll smoke if you'll help along. How's your father? Smart, isn't he?"

The congressman insisted that they should adjourn to his rooms. An unmarried man, he kept bachelor's hall.

at the hotel during his stay in Washington. There in comfortable chairs they spoke of old times, when the captain was seafaring and the Everdean home had been his while his ship was in port at Frisco. He told of his re-

turn to Bayport and the renovation of the old house. Of Bos'n he said nothing. At last Everdean asked what had brought him to Washington.

"Well," said Captain Cy, "I'll tell you. I'm like the feller in court without a lawyer—he said he couldn't tell whether he was guilty or not 'count of havin' no professional advice. That's what I've come to you for, Ed—professional advice."

He told the harbor appropriation story. At the incident of the "committee of one" his friend laughed heartily.

"Rather put your foot in it that time, Captain, didn't you?" he said.

"Yup. Then I got t'other one stuck tryin' to get the first clear. How's it look to you? All straight, do you think, or is there a nigger in the wood pile?"

Mr. Everdean seemed to reflect.

"Well, Captain," he said, "I can't tell. You're asking delicate questions. Politicians are like doctors—they usually back up each other's opinions. Still, you're at least as good a friend of mine as Atkins is. Queer he should bob up in this matter. Why, he—but never mind that now. I tell you, Captain Whittaker, you come around and have dinner with me tomorrow night. In the meantime I'll see the chairman of the committee on that bill—one of the so called 'pork' bills it is. Possibly from him and some other acquaintances of mine I may learn something. At any rate, you come to dinner."

So the invitation was accepted, and Captain Cy went back to his own hotel and his room. He slept but little, although it was not worry over the ap-

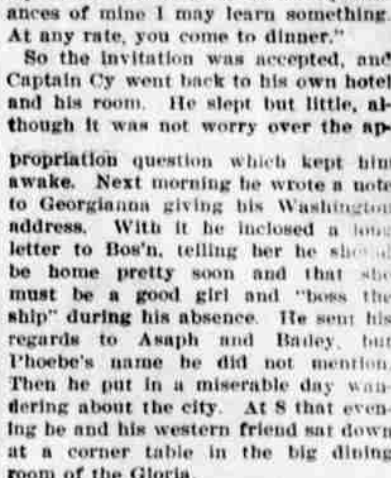
propriation question which kept him awake. Next morning he wrote a note to Georgianna giving his Washington address. With it he inclosed a long letter to Bos'n, telling her he should be home pretty soon and that she must be a good girl and "boss the ship" during his absence. He sent his regards to Asaph and Bailey, but Phoebe's name he did not mention. Then he put in a miserable day wandering about the city. At 8 that evening he and his western friend sat down at a corner table in the big dining room of the Gloria.

The captain began to ask questions as soon as the soup was served, but Everdean refused to answer.

"No, no," he said, "please first and business afterward; that's a congressional motto. I can't talk Atkins with my dinner and enjoy it."

To Be Continued.

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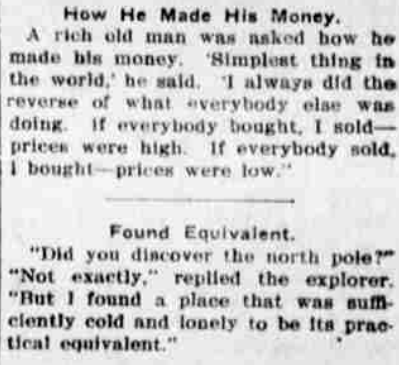
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